

COMMENT

Ken Olende

Return of riots as food crisis grows

POLICE IN Mozambique killed ten people and injured more than 400 during protests against crippling price increases last week. The fighting is a symptom of a growing global food crisis.

People came onto the streets of Mozambique's capital Maputo and other major cities for three days. The government had announced a 30 percent rise in the price of bread along with major increases in the cost of water and energy.

Demonstrators threw stones, burned tyres in the streets and looted shops. The police responded by opening fire with live ammunition. The ten dead included at least two children.

Most Mozambicans spend about three-quarters of their household budget on food, so the increases are an intolerable burden.

Mozambique's president Armando Guebuza was once a guerrilla leader who promised the country would advance to socialism. But tragically, his Frelimo party is now in power and has accepted neoliberalism.

Guebuza is a millionaire businessman and announced last week that, "The price increase is irreversible. Prices will only fall if all of us work hard."

Maputo residents formed long queues outside of bakeries as shops re-opened on Friday of last week.

"People don't have money to buy food," Elisa Aldino, a domestic worker, told reporters as she waited in a bread line in a middle class neighbourhood. "If they don't have money, they sleep without eating."

The World Bank has feted Mozambique as one of the best economies in Africa. For the past ten years it has maintained the fastest growth rate for a non-oil-producing economy in Africa.

Yet it remains one of the world's poorest countries with average income per head of less than £600 a year. It has a 54 percent unemployment rate and 70 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

Flexible

The World Bank points to the spread of mobile phones as one of the success stories of Mozambique's economy—yet, ironically, it was these phones that helped protesters to organise flexible demonstrations at short notice.

The problem is not unique to Mozambique. Just as in the summer of 2008, food insecurity is creating a crisis across the world.

A Financial Times editorial states, "A second food crisis in as many years is a wake-up call."

"The link between food and political stability in the developing world is clear. The crisis of 2007-8 sparked widespread riots, bringing down governments in Haiti and Madagascar."

Most of the 100 million people who were pushed into food poverty in that crisis never emerged from it. In 2006, the number of undernourished people was 854 million. In 2009, it was 1.02 billion—the highest level since records began.

The effects of global warming—such as the fires across Russia—have made food production harder, but the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 2010 will be the world's third highest wheat crop ever.

It is the activities of financial speculators that is deepening the crisis. Raj Patel wrote in the Observer newspaper, "commodity speculators continue to treat food as if it were the same as television sets, with little end in sight to what the World Development Movement has called 'gambling on hunger in financial markets'."

Commodities analyst John Buckley says that speculators are buying wheat because they hope agricultural problems will cause prices to go on rising. So the rises are based on profiteering not an actual food shortage.

Price rises in Britain cause misery, but in poorer countries they lead to starvation. Before the riots broke out in Mozambique there had already been major food protests this year in many countries, including India, Egypt, Serbia and Pakistan.

Across the world people will have to fight to stop their livelihoods—and their lives—being taken away by the profit system.

ANTI-RACISM

Travellers resist Tory assault on their rights

Gypsies and Travellers across Europe are facing a number of bigoted attacks, and those in Britain are no exception, writes Sadie Robinson

PROTESTERS gathered outside the French embassy in London last Saturday to demonstrate against president Nicolas Sarkozy's recent expulsion of Roma communities from the country.

The action was part of a day of protests across Europe that saw tens of thousands take to the streets in solidarity with Roma people (see report of the French protests below).

"Enough is enough," said Florence Joelle—a French citizen living in London who came to the protest.

"When governments start targeting people simply because they belong to an ethnic group, we're in trouble."

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) organised the protest. Mairead Moore from ITMB told Socialist Worker, "We're here to show solidarity with the Roma in France."

"You don't have to look too far back in history to see where this kind of thing leads to."

"Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are protected under race relations legislation but there are no human rights for us."

Brush

"Why do governments sign up to human rights legislation if they don't believe in it?"

Tracy Sherlock is also from the ITMB. "We're being treated like animals," she told Socialist Worker. "It's like people think we don't have a right to live here."

"My family is Irish but I was



Demonstration at the French embassy in London

born and raised in this country. The worst thing about being a Traveller is being looked at like I'm a piece of dirt."

"The media paints us all with one brush, saying we all steal."

Many protesters were also there to draw attention to the plight of Traveller communities in Britain—particularly the attacks faced by those living at Dale Farm in Essex.

The Traveller community there is the largest in Britain, bringing together more than 1,000 people.

It has existed since the 1970s but Tory-run Basildon district council is threatening to evict all the families after they lost a legal challenge to stay last year.

The council is also planning to use bailiffs to evict eight Gypsy families in Wickford, Essex.

A human rights eviction watch at the site began on Monday.

Many people worry that the planned eviction could be the start of bigger attacks on Travellers in Britain.

The Tories have already scrapped Labour's Regional Strategies plan that set targets for councils to provide land for Travellers.

The government withdrew £30 million of funding for Gypsy and Traveller sites in May.

Violet Cannon, a Gypsy from Doncaster, South Yorkshire, joined Saturday's protest.

"The coalition government

is undoing so much work that we've done," she told Socialist Worker.

"They have already made things worse for us."

"There are 8,000 Gypsies in Doncaster. We might seem invisible, but councils can't just disregard us."

Uproar

"If any other ethnic group was treated like we are then there would be an uproar. But because we're Gypsies it's swept under the carpet."

Supporters of Travellers' rights who came to the protest had similar concerns. "I'm not sure how big this is on the political agenda," said Alison Clarke.

"The media isn't covering it properly and we need to draw more attention to it."

"The government is systematically targeting Travellers at Dale Farm. I wonder if the eviction will be the start of a creeping campaign against travellers. We have to take a stand."

Ulrike Schmidt, a volunteer with Amnesty International, agreed.

"Roma have lived in Europe for over 1,000 years and have been periodically attacked whenever scapegoats were needed," she told Socialist Worker. "We can't take that lying down."

"European Union citizens have been deported from France simply because of their ethnic origin. It's outrageous. This is the 21st century—we should have learnt from the 20th."



Demonstrating for Roma and immigrant rights in Paris last Saturday

Picture: Phototheque Rouge/JMB

Unity on march as French resist scapegoating of Roma

AROUND 100,000 people took part in over 130 demonstrations across France last Saturday against the government's attacks on immigrants and Roma people.

The biggest protest was in Paris where around 50,000 marched.

Other demonstrations took place outside French embassies across much of Europe.

The right wing government of Nicolas Sarkozy has already removed around 1,000 Roma from the country.

It is whipping up racism to deflect from its problems over a funding scandal and to divide opposition to its attacks on pensions.

The anger over state racism is linking to the fury over the austerity measures that led to

Tuesday's general strike (see page 5).

Bernard Thibault, general secretary of the CGT union federation, told marchers in Paris, "Defending freedom and the principles of democracy goes hand in hand with defending social rights."

"When freedom decreases, social rights decrease too."

The opposition Socialist

Party was prominent on some protests, but some of its leading figures are pandering to racism.

François Rebsamen, the Socialist mayor of Dijon, called for caution in supporting the protests.

He said, "Don't ask our mayors and municipal representatives to set up Roma camps in our towns or turn a blind eye to certain squatters."